



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

CONSULAR REFORMS.

BY HENRY WHITE, EX-SECRETARY OF THE UNITED STATES
EMBASSY AT LONDON.

It is beyond a doubt that the movement in favor of reform in the Consular Service has of late made noticeable strides in this country. People are at last beginning to realize that the present system of appointments and removals for political reasons is very prejudicial to our commercial interests, especially when those of other countries are in the hands of consuls whose careful training and long experience give them every advantage over ours, and at a time when competition is so keen for trade in all parts of the world.

We send out consuls, many of whom are not only ignorant of foreign languages, but often of everything which such officials should know; and in order to do this we remove others just as they are beginning to acquire the knowledge and experience indispensable to the position. The result is that the Consular Service of the United States is a very costly training-school, from which the country derives little or no benefit.

I refer to the system and not to individuals—certainly not to the efficient consuls whom I have known, especially in Great Britain. We usually send, however, men of ability and good standing to that country, where in any case their efficiency cannot be impaired by ignorance of the language.

The urgency for consular reform has of late been frequently brought to the attention of the public by a series of interesting magazine articles,* each of which was extensively, and with very

* I refer particularly to those of the Hon. Robert Adams, M. C., and of the Hon. W. F. Wharton, Assistant Secretary of State under the late administration, which appeared in this Review; to the opinions of the Hon. Robert Lincoln and other well-known public men, published in the *Century* of last June; and to the Hon. A. H. Washburn's article in the August *Atlantic Monthly*.

few exceptions favorably, commented upon by newspapers of both parties throughout the country. A forcible address was also delivered on the subject to the National Board of Trade in January last by Hon. Theodore Roosevelt; and quite recently Admiral Erben, whose opportunities have been frequent of observing the sorry figure often cut by our consuls in comparison with those of other countries, has expressed himself as strongly in favor of this reform, which is advocated by the National Board of Trade and other commercial bodies. Unquestionably, however, public opinion was especially aroused and crystallized by what has been aptly described in the newspapers as the "Consular Debauch" in which the late Assistant Secretary of State, Mr. Josiah Quincy, was permitted to indulge during his brief tenure of office.

Between March 4th and December 31st, 1893, 30 out of 35 consuls-general and 133 out of 183 first-class consuls and commercial agents were changed, the numbers in the British Empire alone being 7 consuls-general (the entire number), and 62 out of 88 consuls and commercial agents. In Great Britain and Ireland the consul-general and 18 consuls and commercial agents out of a total of 24 were changed, Manchester being the only first-class consulate omitted from this clean sweep.

It is impossible to suppose that such an upheaval was intended to benefit the Consular Service, or that it could have been otherwise than exceedingly detrimental to its efficiency. Nor is it a matter for surprise, when the numerous removals which have taken place this year are added to the above figures, that most people should agree with Mr. Theodore Roosevelt in the opinion that the present system is

"undoubtedly directly responsible for immense damages to our trade and commercial relations, and costs our mercantile classes hundreds of thousands—in all probability, many millions—of dollars every year."

It is not my intention, however, to make out a "case" against the Administration, nor to raise a question as to the extent to which President Cleveland has or has not carried out in his consular appointments the views relative to public office to which he at one time gave such frequent utterance.

My object is (1) to show that the system under which it is possible for the President to dismiss consuls by the hundred, and to appoint in their stead men of whom no proof of fitness is required,

is not only prejudicial to our commercial interests, but derogatory to our dignity as a nation ; (2) to give a brief account of the manner in which the efficient Consular Services of Great Britain and France are recruited ; and (3) to make a few suggestions as to the system which should be adopted in the United States.

The numerous duties of a consul have been so fully set forth of late by others, that it would be superfluous for me to repeat them. Suffice it to say that the most important of them all are : (1) the increase of our national revenue by detecting frauds in invoices on which articles to be imported to the United States are entered at less than their value ; and (2) the promotion of our foreign trade by obtaining and sending home such information as is likely to be of assistance to our merchants in its maintenance and development.

There is, unfortunately, no means of estimating accurately the immense annual loss incurred through failure on the part of consuls to keep our merchants promptly and accurately informed as to the condition of trade. Such information is obtainable by a consul not only from printed statistics, but more particularly by mixing freely with the leading merchants and inhabitants of his district, and becoming thereby imbued with the local current of commercial thought. But the following quotation from Mr. Washburn will give an idea of the extent to which the national revenue may suffer :

“The aggregate amount lost to the government in this way is almost incalculable ; but some idea of it may be gathered, when it is remembered that an increase of only $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. in invoice valuations at the little industrial centre of Crefeld alone would result in an annual accession to the customs receipts of \$150,000. It is beyond mere conjecture that an addition of at least 5 per cent. could be brought about and maintained at many posts by competent and trained officers.”

A consul cannot attain a thorough familiarity with the value of every article exported from his district, nor be able to detect frauds in invoice valuations, nor acquire a thorough knowledge of the people among whom he lives and of their methods of business, unless he be able to speak the language of the country and live there a number of years. Nevertheless, in Mexico, Central and South America, where we are supposed, and certainly ought, to exercise a greater influence than any other power, we require of our consuls neither a prolonged residence nor a knowledge of the Spanish language.

The following incidents will help to show what is possible and has occurred under the present system.

Shortly before President Harrison went out of office a communication was made by a leading European power to the United States Legation at its capital, requesting that the new administration be asked not to appoint as consul in an important dependency of that power an American citizen who had made himself objectionable to the local authorities by alleged attempts to cheat the customs, boasts of "getting a rise out of the government," and otherwise, and who had announced that upon the assumption of the Presidency by Mr. Cleveland he would receive the appointment in question. This communication was promptly transmitted to the Department of State, and under any other system but ours the matter would have ended there.

Shortly afterwards, however, the name of the individual in question appeared in a list of new appointments as consul at the very place at which we had been given to understand that he could not be received. Telegraphic inquiries were at once made, and elicited the fact that owing to the pressure of applications for office with which the State Department was just then overwhelmed, this important request of a friendly power had been overlooked. The appointment had, of course, to be withdrawn; but I need scarcely point out the difference from an international point of view between not making it and being compelled to withdraw one actually made.

The other incident to which I refer has recently occurred in Spain. In 1890, the consular agent at Seville—sent there, be it remembered, not as a missionary, but to represent the civilization of the United States and to further our commerce—thought it his duty to bombard with Protestant tracts the procession of the Corpus Christi as it passed through the streets. The excitement caused by this singular proceeding was great, and the official in question was arrested, being thereby protected from personal violence on the part of those who witnessed and were outraged by his conduct, which was promptly brought by the Spanish Government to the attention of our Minister at Madrid, who had him removed. This was bad enough, but it is not all. The same individual has actually been sent back again to Seville in a consular capacity, and I am informed that our government is pressing for

his recognition, to which Spain naturally demurs, and had not, up to a recent period, acceded.

The efficiency of a consul cannot be otherwise than seriously impaired when there exists a strong local animosity or prejudice against him. For this reason it is a great mistake, as has been pointed out by others, to send, as we often do, naturalized citizens as consuls to countries from which they originally emanated, our native citizens being much less likely to excite such local feeling. It is even more objectionable, however, to appoint members of the Jewish religion to consular posts in countries in which public opinion is strongly anti-semitic, as the latter involves social, and to a considerable extent political, ostracism. The same man sent elsewhere might prove a very useful consul ; but under the above conditions it is impossible.

Great Britain, France, Germany, and other European countries take a very different view of the importance of their Consular Services, which are organized with the utmost care.

The British service was established in its present form by Act of Parliament in 1825 (6 Geo. IV., cap. 87). Up to that time its members had been appointed, on no regular system, by the king, and were paid from his civil list. This act placed the service under the Foreign Office, and provided for its payment out of funds to be voted by Parliament. Since then it has been the subject of periodical investigation by royal commissions and Parliamentary committees, with a view to the improvement of its efficiency. The evidence taken on these occasions is published in voluminous Blue-Books, the perusal of which I recommend to those interested in the reform in our service.

Appointments are made by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Candidates must be recommended by some one known to him, and their names and qualifications are thereupon entered on a list, from which he selects a name when a vacancy occurs. The candidate selected, whose age must be between twenty-five and fifty, is then required to pass an examination before the Civil Service Commissioners in the following subjects : (1) English language. (2) French language, which the candidate must be able to write and speak "correctly and fluently." (3) Language of the place at which the consular official is to reside. It must be known sufficiently to enable him to communicate directly

with the authorities and natives of the place.* (4) British mercantile law. (5) Arithmetic to a sufficient extent to enable the consul to draw up commercial tables and reports.†

Men usually enter the service as vice-consuls, and are promoted or not according to their merits, but there is no regularity or certainty about promotion, owing to the fact that a man may be very suitable for one place and not at all for another. There is a strong feeling against removing a consul from a post in which he is doing well. To such an extent is this the case that a man is sometimes promoted to be Consul-General, without a change of post. A notable instance of this is Mr. Frederic Bernal, who was transferred in 1866 from Baltimore to Havre, where he was promoted, in 1883, to be Consul-General, and still remains.

The majority of British consuls will consequently be found to have occupied very few posts. The entire career of the late Consul-General at New York, which covered a period of over forty years, was spent at San Francisco (1851-1883) and New York (1883-1894); and the late British Consul at Paris held that post from 1865 until his death recently.

There are two important branches of the service for which candidates are specially trained, and admission to which is by means of a competitive examination open to the public, and whereof due notice is given beforehand in the newspapers, namely: The Levant (Turkey, Egypt, Persia), and the China, Japan, and Siam services.

Those who are successful in these examinations are appointed "Student Interpreters." They must be unmarried and between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four.

These student interpreters must study Oriental languages either at Oxford or at a British legation or consulate in the country to which they are to be accredited. They are called on to pass further examinations at intervals, and if successful they become eligible for employment, first as assistants, and afterwards as interpreters, vice-consuls, and consuls, as vacancies occur.

* German being requisite for posts in northern Europe, Spanish or Portuguese for Spain, Portugal, Morocco, and South or Central America; Italian for places in Italy, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, the Black Sea, or the Mediterranean (except Morocco and Spain).

† This examination is not competitive, and the Secretary of State has the power, under a special clause of an Order in Council, to dispense with it in exceptional cases, such as the appointment of a high official from another branch of the public service to a quasi-political post.

The salaries of British consular officers are fixed, under the Act of Parliament of July 21, 1891 (54 and 55 Vict., cap. 36), by the Secretary of State, with the approval of the Treasury, and no increase can be made in any salary without the approval of the latter. They average about £600 (\$3,000) a year, but, of course, some of the important posts are much more highly paid: the salary of the Consul-General at New York being £2,000 (nearly \$10,000), with an office allowance besides of £1,660, and a staff consisting of a consul at £600, and two vice-consuls at £400 and £250, respectively; that of the Consul at San Francisco, £1,200 (nearly \$6,000), with an office allowance or £600 besides.

British consular officials are retired at the age of seventy with a pension.

There is also an unpaid branch of the service, consisting chiefly of vice-consuls, appointed at places which are not of sufficient importance to merit a paid official. They are usually British merchants, but may be foreigners. They are not subjected to an examination, and are rarely promoted to a paid appointment.

Consular clerks are required to pass an examination in handwriting and orthography, arithmetic, and one foreign language (speaking, translating, and copying).

In France, the consular service has for years past been an object of the most careful solicitude to successive governments, and the subject of frequent decrees tending to improve its efficiency on the part of the Chief of State.

Many of these decrees, and of the recommendations by Ministers of Foreign Affairs on which they were based, are interesting, and they show how the French have realized, under all recent forms of government, and particularly under the present republic, the absolute necessity of keeping "politics" out of their Consular Service, and devoting its energies exclusively to the interests of French trade.

The French service consists of consuls-general, first and second class consuls, vice-consuls, and pupil consuls (*élève consuls*). From the latter, vacancies are chiefly filled. A competitive examination takes place once a year for vacancies in the list of attaché of embassy and pupil consul. In order to compete therein, a man must have previously obtained admission to the "stage"—a probationary period of not less than one nor more

than three years—during which his fitness for the career contemplated (Foreign Office, Diplomatic, or Consular) is tested. The Foreign Minister nominates these probationers (*stagiaires*), who must be under 27 years of age, and possessors of a collegiate degree in law, science, or letters, or who must have passed certain other examinations or be holders of a commission in the army or navy.

This examination for pupil consuls is in international law, and English or German, political economy or political and commercial geography. Those whose papers are sufficiently creditable in the opinion of the examiners to warrant their going any further are then subjected to a public oral examination in geography, maritime and customs law, in addition to the subjects already mentioned. The successful competitors become eligible for appointment as pupil consuls, and before being assigned to a consulate they are obliged to spend at least one year at one of the principal chambers of commerce, whence they must send the minister periodical reports on the trade of the district. After three years' service as pupil consuls they are eligible for promotion to a vice consulship. No official in the French Consular Service can be promoted until he has served at least three years in a grade.

There are, furthermore, chancellors also, whose chief functions are to keep the accounts; interpreters and dragomen for the Levant and Asiatic services, who attain those posts by means of special examinations, and may eventually become vice-consuls, with hope of subsequent promotion.

In addition to the foregoing safeguards, a Committee of Consultation on Consulates (*Comité Consultatif de Consulats*) was created by Presidential decree in 1891. It consists of twenty-five members, of whom three are Senators, five members of the Chamber of Deputies, and nine Presidents of leading chambers of commerce.

Its functions are to advise the minister on matters pertaining to the Consular Service, particularly in connection with the development of trade.

Many more details might be given of the elaborate precautions taken by the French, but this sketch will suffice to give a general idea on the subject.

Want of space prevents me from giving similar details as to the German and other services, whose efficiency is well known.

It is not unreasonable to suppose that if consular services recruited in the manner I have described are productive of satisfactory results, we should, under a system somewhat similar, have one quite as good.

There is but one way, however, to obtain such a service, namely, a determination on the part of the American people to eliminate from it politics and "the spoils system," and to establish it on the same permanent footing as our naval and military services.

I would suggest that our service should consist of consuls-general, consuls (of two or three classes), and vice-consuls, the number of officials in each grade to be determined by Congress, and the unmeaning designation of vice or deputy consul-general abolished: consular agents and consuls permitted to engage in business to be only retained (not as a portion of the regular service) where absolutely necessary, and with a view to their abolition at as early a date as may be practicable.

Those seeking admission to the service after a certain date (to be fixed by Congress) should be compelled to pass an examination in (1) the English language, (2) arithmetic, (3) commercial law, and (4) one or two foreign languages, either French, German, or Spanish (with a view to our interests in South America) to be compulsory, and the examination therein rigid. Successful candidates should be appointed vice-consuls.

Each original appointment as vice-consul and each subsequent promotion must be made by the President and confirmed by the Senate, as provided by the Constitution; but the assignment to posts of those appointed should, so long as no increase of rank takes place, be left to the Secretary of State. I can see nothing in the Constitution to compel the President to assign consuls to particular posts at the moment of their appointment, and there is no more sense in his doing so than there would be in his giving a captain in the navy the command of a ship or an admiral that of a squadron at the moment of his promotion.

The only foundation upon which a reorganization such as I have suggested can be based with any hope of success, is the Consular Service as existing at the time the same goes into effect; all vacancies after a certain date to be filled under the new system, and no removals to take place after the same date, save for causes to be determined by a board of officials, and which should, in each case, be communicated to Congress.

“Equalizing” the appointments between both political parties as a preliminary to consular reform is, to my mind, impossible, as it would admit of the continuation of the present system of removals.

Nor would the proposal to raise the consular salaries be of any avail, under the present system, in improving the service. Many of our consuls are insufficiently paid, and under a reformed system many salaries should undoubtedly be increased and a number of unnecessary posts should at the same time be abolished;* but to increase the salaries before the organization of a permanent service would merely augment the competition for, and consequent acquisition of, places on the part of those unfitted to fill them.

It has been said that it will be difficult for us thus to reorganize our service owing to the fact that no Congressional legislation can modify the power given to the President by the Constitution to appoint whomsoever he pleases as consul, provided the Senate assent. But surely, if Congress was able to prescribe, as it did by the act of 1855, and has often done since, where consular representatives should be appointed and what should be their rank and salary, the people can insist, through their Senators and Representatives, upon the appointment to posts thus created of such persons only as are duly qualified to fill them, and to prescribe the manner in which such qualifications shall be proved.

Even if this cannot be done by an act of Congress, a resolution can be passed by that body requesting the President in future only to appoint those who have demonstrated their fitness by means of an examination; and, if popular feeling were sufficiently strong on the subject, it is not to be supposed that any President would venture to disregard it in his consular appointments, or, if he did, that the Senate would confirm the appointees, or that the House of Representatives would vote their salaries.

It is presumable, moreover, that the President would welcome relief from any portion of the importunity on the part of office-seekers, with which he is overwhelmed.

The whole matter is, therefore, absolutely in the hands of the people of the United States, who have only to bring pressure to bear upon Congress, without which no great reform was ever accomplished.

* Notably in British North America, where we have about 130 consular officers, including three consuls-general.

An opportunity for doing this will probably occur during the coming session, when presumably the bills introduced last year by Senator Morgan and Representative Storer, providing for the creation of a permanent service, will be again brought in. It is earnestly to be hoped that the people will insist upon their due consideration. They require certain modifications, but are correct in principle and should be passed.

The chief obstacle to the creation of a service such as I have suggested appears to me to lie in the sacrifice likely to be entailed upon the political party which, being in possession of the executive branch of the government when the proposed reform goes into effect, is compelled to leave a considerable number of the opposite party's appointees in office. It is scarcely to be doubted, however, that such party will gain far more in the way of popular approval than it will lose through inability to give away a certain number of offices to its retainers; and there need be no fear that those retaining the consular offices would become "offensive partisans." They will, on the contrary, become what most of our diplomatic and consular officials long to be—servants of their country and not of a political party.

The few who might thirst for political activity would find the Consular Service an uncommonly poor field in which to give it scope, and would soon resign; but I do not think their number would be large. Some officials would not improbably have to be removed in the manner I have suggested for incompetence or other shortcomings, and their places would be filled by others who had deserved promotion and who would be succeeded by those appointed vice-consuls under the new system.

An efficient service in which eventually only those would remain who were disposed to make it a career, would thus come gradually into existence.

It is only by a gradual process of improvement in the existing services, and not by the sudden creation of new ones through parliamentary action or otherwise, that those in Europe, to which I have referred, have attained their present degree of efficiency; and it is only by a process somewhat similar, that ours can be made to produce the results which the people of this country have a right to expect, and which, I believe, it is their intention shortly to obtain.

HENRY WHITE.